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AUTHOR Matlock, Tracy; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is the most frequent type of violent crime, thus children are likely to experience or witness violence at home. In this study, familial variables predictive of domestic violence were investigated. Data were collected from 64 intake forms at a battered women's shelter in the Mississippi Delta. Most clients were white and had children. The batterer was usually the family's financial provider, although most were unemployed at the time of abuse. Whether clients were physically abused as a child was correlated with whether their siblings were abused, and to emotional and sexual abuse. Drugs and alcohol were involved in most cases involving battery. The clients' father being an alcoholic was correlated with spouse abuse between the client's parents. The client's mother being an alcoholic was associated with the client's sexual abuse as a child. Children knew about the abuse in most cases and child abuse seemed to be tied to spousal abuse with 63.5% of the clients reporting their children had been emotionally abused, and 38.5% had been physically abused. These findings support theories viewing domestic violence as a familial pattern. Because of laws requiring counselors to report suspected child abuse, counselors in schools must be kept knowledgeable about familial variables that predict domestic violence. (Author/JBJ)

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Familial Variables Related to Domestic Violence

Tracy Matlock John R. Slate David A. Saarnio

Arkansas State University

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, November 9-11, 1994.

Abstract

Children today are likely to experience or witness violence in the home. With domestic violence the most frequent type of violent crime, children's homes are no longer a safe haven. In this study, we investigated familial variables predictive of domestic violence. Data were collected from 64 intake forms at a battered women's shelter in the Mississippi Delta. Most clients were white (86%) and had children (89%). The batterer was usually (61.3%) the family's financial provider, although most (71%) were unemployed at the time of abuse. Whether clients were physically abused as a child was correlated, r = .74, with whether their siblings were abused, and, importantly, to emotional, r = .35, and sexual, r = .31, abuse. Drugs/alcohol were involved in most cases (61%) involving battery. The client's father being an alcoholic was correlated, r = .41, with spouse abuse between the client's parents. The client's mother being an alcoholic was associated, r = .27, with the client's sexual abuse as a child. These findings support theories viewing domestic violence as a familial pattern. Because of the laws requiring counselors to report suspected child abuse, counselors in schools must be knowledgeable about familial variables that predict domestic violence.

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Domestic violence is, unfortunately, a common place occurrence. Statistics compiled by the Arkansas Coalition Against Violence to Women and Children indicate that domestic violence is the major cause of injuries to women, exceeding automobile accidents, muggings, and rapes combined; one third of all women murdered in the U.S. are killed by their husbands or lovers; domestic violence occurs at least once in up to half of all marriages; in one in five intimate male/female relationships, the man regularly beats his partner; and, domestic violence is the most frequently experienced type of violent crime (Cited in Northeast Arkansas Council on Family Violence Volunteer Training Manual, 1994).

From battered women seeking assistance, research data have been gathered on both victims and abusers. Although battered women can come from very different backgrounds, several commonalities exist. Some studies have revealed that 70% of battered women go back to their batterer and that more than half of those women leave again. It is often the loss of the relationship, their role in the family, and their security that make it very difficult for battered women to leave their spouses or partners (Shapiro & Truner, 1986). In addition, a lack of community resources such as educational programs, jobs, financial help, housing, legal assistance, and childcare is available to help battered women (Basta, Davidson, Sullivan, & Tan, 1992).

Thus, domestic violence is a major problem in our society. In this study, we attempted to examine what factors are related to domestic violence in a sample from the Delta region of the Mid-South. The primary research question in this study was 'what familial variables are predictive of domestic violence?'

Method

Data were collected from client intake forms at a shelter for battered women in Arkansas (in the Mississippi Delta region). Information was gathered from current client intake forms completed when battered women made their first contact with the agency. Of the 100 current client intake forms at this agency, only 64 forms were completed sufficiently to be used for this study. The intake form from which data were recorded included areas such as victim (i.e., client) and abuser's race and age; education level; employment status; drug/alcohol abuse; involvement of a weapon; types of battering; types of injuries; abuse witnessed by client's child; whether the client's child was abused; and, client's history of abuse by former partners and/or her nuclear family.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Predictors of violence will be presented in two ways, using the percentages from demographic information, and using correlations.

Who were the victims? They were, on average, 30 years of age (29.6), just 3 years younger than the batterers (32.5). The most prevalent ethnic group of reported cases of domestic violence within this Arkansas agency was Caucasian (85.9%). The majority of the sample (71.4%) was not employed; rather, the batterer tended to be the financial provider of the family (61.3% of cases). In addition, approximately 9 out of 10 (88.7%) had children.

Are there any contextual variables predictive of abuse? As you might expect, drugs and/or alcohol were involved in most cases (61.3%). Interestingly, half of the abusers owned a gun (49.2%), and that turned out to be a predictor of the type of abuse (r = +.27) and type of battery (r= + .31) that occurred. That is, ownership of a gun was related to there being more types of abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional), and presence of a gun was predictive of more severe forms of battery.

These are the same variables that are related to extent of injury. To determine what variables would be predictive of whether or not the client sustained injuries, a discriminant analysis was conducted. The resulting

discriminant function was statistically significant, $\chi^2(9) = 19.41$, $p < .05$, and accounted for 41.0% of the variance (i.e., canonical correlation = .649). Two items, depicted in Table 2, contributed to the differentiation between persons who sustained injuries from those who did not. Drugs and alcohol were again an integral factor as was the type of battery that occurred. As would be expected, as the type of battery became more severe (i.e., pushing and/or slapping to use of a weapon), the person was more likely to sustain an injury.

Insert Table 2 about here

Was there any previous history of abuse? Yes, 48.2% of the clients had been abused before, and 72.6% of the abusers or clients had been previously arrested. But the history goes even further. Slightly more than half (52.6%) of the victims reported that their parents had committed spousal abuse, so there appears to be a familial pattern. Further, if the clients were victims of physical abuse as children, they were likely to experience emotional abuse, $r = +.35$, and sexual abuse, $r = +.31$. On top of that, abuse of the clients as children was related to abuse of their siblings ($r = +.74$). And, in line with the current sample, alcohol use by parents also was a factor. Being an alcoholic was correlated with spousal abuse by the fathers of clients ($r = +.41$) and with sexual abuse of the clients when their mothers were alcoholics ($r = +.27$). In other words, in both the present and the past, alcohol is an important component of abuse. This is also supported by a second discriminant analysis.

A second discriminant analysis was conducted to determine which variables would differentiate persons whose parents had engaged in spousal abuse from those persons whose parents had not. The resulting discriminant function was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 12.75$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 22.5% of the variance (i.e., canonical correlation = .474). The two items that contributed to the differentiation between these groups are shown in Table 3. Persons whose parents had committed spousal abuse were more likely than persons who did not report spousal abuse among their parents for their fathers to have been alcoholics and for themselves to have been sexually abused as children.

Insert Table 3 about here

What will be of large concern in the present context is "what about the children?" Well, it turns out that the children know about the abuse--92.3% of clients reported that the children were aware of it. More importantly, spousal abuse seems to be tied in with child abuse---63.5% of the clients reported that their children had been emotionally abused, and that 38.5% had been physically abused.

Conclusions

Our findings agree with previous research that drug and alcohol abuse are involved in a substantial amount of domestic violence cases. Moreover, these findings support theories viewing domestic violence as a familial pattern. Because of the laws requiring counselors to report suspected child abuse, counselors in schools must be knowledgeable about familial variables that predict domestic violence.

References

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample.

Demographic Variable	Percentages	
	Yes	No
Weapon Involved	36.1	63.9
Drugs Involved	61.3	38.7
Race of client: Caucasian	85.9	14.1
High school graduate/GED (client)	50.0	25.8
College/Vocational (client)	25.8	74.2
Client Employed	28.6	71.4
Client Has Children	88.7	11.3
Client Previously at a Shelter	22.6	77.4
Race of abuser: Caucasian	81.3	18.8
High school graduate/GED (abuser)	66.0	22.6
College/Vocational (abuser)	9.4	88.7
Abuser Employed	61.3	38.7
Past arrest of abuser or client	72.6	27.4
Abuser owns a gun	49.2	50.8
Children's awareness of abuse	92.3	7.7
Children emotionally abused	63.5	36.5
Children physically abused	38.5	61.5
Victim's parents abused one another	52.6	47.4
Was victim abused previously by a partner	48.2	51.8

Table 2

Differences Between Persons Who Sustained Injuries from Those Persons Who Did Not.

Item	Pooled within group correlation
Involvement of drugs and alcohol.	+0.38
Form of battery that occurred, ranging from pushing and/or slapping to use of weapon.	+0.31

Note. Group centroids are +0.96 for persons who reported sustaining injuries and -0.72 for persons who did not. The positive coefficients above indicate that drugs and alcohol were present during domestic violence and that as the battery form become more severe, the more likely it was for the person to report sustaining an injury.

Table 3

Differences Between Persons whose Parents Engaged in Spousal Abuse from Those Persons Whose Parents Did Not.

Item	Pooled within group correlation
Victim's father was an alcoholic.	+0.82
Victim was sexually abused as a child.	+0.62

Note. Group centroids are +0.54 for persons who reported spousal abuse among their parents and -0.52 for persons who did not. The positive coefficients above indicate that persons who reported spousal abuse among their parents were more likely to report that their fathers were alcoholics and that they had been sexually abused as a child.